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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#) [BM](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO ON OVAL OFFICE, BURMA,
DPRK, PEACE PROCESS

REF: A. STATE 82592
[1](#)B. STATE 83598

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a private August 12 breakfast meeting with the Ambassador, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo expressed heartfelt appreciation for the warm reception President Arroyo's party received at the Oval Office on July 30, and for the highly successful cabinet-level meetings that had transpired during Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's Washington visit. He outlined Philippine outrage over the guilty verdict rendered in the case of detained Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, while frankly admitting his frustration in searching for a means to influence the behavior of the ruling Burmese junta. Romulo was pleased that former President Clinton had secured the release of U.S. journalists detained in North Korea, but he clearly understood the private humanitarian nature of Clinton's mission, and the need to maintain pressure on the DPRK with regard to its nuclear ambitions. The Ambassador and Foreign Secretary discussed their shared optimism that meaningful peace negotiations appear to be back on track between the government and separatist Muslim rebels, after a year of violence that has resulted in significant loss of life and displaced tens of thousands from their homes and livelihoods. END SUMMARY.

Oval Office Visit a Smashing Success

[1](#)2. (C) The Foreign Secretary was effusive in his praise of President Obama, noting the President's courteous and genuine manner in welcoming President Arroyo and her party to the White House July 30. Romulo was especially impressed with Obama's mastery of the issues and his willingness to listen. The Foreign Secretary remarked that in discussions among themselves following the Oval Office meeting, all had commented on the graciousness of their reception, with more than one affirming that Obama had made them feel "like the most important nation in the world." Foreign Secretary Romulo added that all had found the associated Cabinet-level meetings while in Washington extremely useful. He then began to discuss the Philippines' role in chairing the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to be held in New York next May; this will be reported septel.

Outrage Over Burmese Verdict

[1](#)3. (C) The conversation then turned to the subject of the Burmese court's August 11 guilty verdict for detained pro-democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi (reftel B). Romulo asserted that ASEAN must do more to influence the Burmese regime, notwithstanding the lack of public outrage on the part of many ASEAN members such as Singapore -- whose

lethargy he ascribed to their extensive interaction with Burmese junta members seeking banking and health care services. Romulo expressed frustration at the larger question of how to reach the Burmese regime, which he characterized as seemingly immune to international pressure. He added that the upcoming August 14 visit to the Philippines of the Thai prime minister might offer an opportunity for useful discussions on Burma.

Congratulations on Clinton's North Korea Feat

14. (C) The Foreign Secretary recounted his pleasure at former President Bill Clinton's success in securing the August 5 release of two American journalists who had been held prisoner in North Korea since March. The Ambassador underscored the private humanitarian nature of President Clinton's mission, and emphasized that it was not connected with the United States' ongoing efforts to rein in North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its development of long-range ballistic missiles (reftel A). While Romulo clearly understood the distinction, he offered the view that former President Clinton's gesture of engagement with North Korean Premier Kim Jong Il might nonetheless prove useful in influencing the DPRK's return to Six-Party Talks.

Peace Process Back on Track

15. (C) The Ambassador and Foreign Minister discussed renewed peace efforts by the Arroyo administration and the Muslim-separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

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Romulo said that "momentum is on our side," and he observed that Malaysian facilitators finally seemed more focused now, under that country's new leadership. The Ambassador offered assurances that the U.S. would remain closely engaged, and underscored American wishes to be helpful to the process in any way possible. Foreign Secretary Romulo thanked the Ambassador for U.S. development assistance and military capacity-building in the southern Philippines, and expressed the hope that when a final peace deal was closer to fruition, the United States might consider an "arms-to-farms" program for demobilized combatants, as had been done after the 1996 peace accord with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The Ambassador assured the Secretary that the U.S. would look very carefully at such a program and do all it could to support a comprehensive peace deal.

KENNEY